



# Open Space and Habitat

## THE CHALLENGE

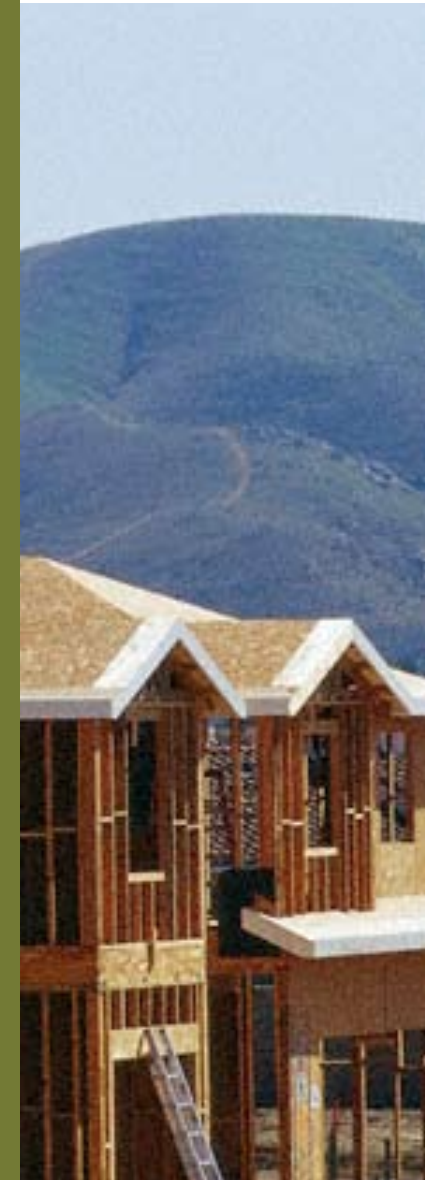
As the SCAG region rapidly urbanizes open space resources that enhance quality of life and provide environmental benefit are disappearing. In areas where development abuts natural lands or agricultural lands, these resources are often lost to make room for new development or to accommodate services for existing development. Many cores (large blocks of habitats) and linkages are unprotected. In urbanized areas, open space resources such as parks, trails and greenbelts are often scarce.

Currently, our region is experiencing unprecedented development and our open spaces will suffer the consequences of inaction. Already, in the most urbanized areas of the region, there is more developed land than natural lands, parks, and farmland combined. Although, there is a seeming abundance of private vacant lands and even farmlands in the slowly urbanizing and rural areas, the actions taken in urbanized areas have already impacted open space throughout the region:

- The extirpation of species in one part of the region leads to federal and/or state listings affecting areas where these species still occur. The loss and degradation of special habitats (wetlands, riparian, sage scrub, and native

grasslands) from past development leads to region-wide regulations.

- Development, past and present, continues to affect water quality and watershed conditions throughout the region.
- Our transportation system created many of the development patterns that exist today. This system crosses almost all large tracts of open space outside of urban areas, impeding wildlife movement and leads to wildlife loss as road kill. In areas where development has also occurred, wildlife linkages have been narrowed or severed. Based on a statewide assessment, there are at least 72 linkages at risk of being severed by existing and projected development.
- Agricultural lands exceeded developed lands in the existing urban core and in outlying areas until relatively recently. Both the rate and amount of conversions to non-farm uses continues to increase. For the first time in its history, it appears the region may have more developed lands than agricultural lands.



## OPEN SPACE RESOURCES

**Natural Lands:** Undeveloped vacant land with natural vegetation, including lands used for grazing; lands with wildlife habitat.

**Cores:** blocks of natural lands that are greater than 1,000 acres and have minimal edge to area ratio.

**Fragments:** patches of habitat smaller than 1,000 acres located within or farther than one mile from a core.

**Community Open Space:** Public open space in or serving communities, such as park and recreation areas, community gardens, dedicated open space, urban forests, greenbelts, and trail systems.

**Farmland:** Prime farmland, farmland of statewide importance, unique farmland, and farmland of local importance.

# PRELIMINARY DRAFT

Three categories of open space are addressed in this chapter, all of which have common attributes such as aesthetic, air quality, and water quality benefits. Each also offers unique benefits:

- **Natural Lands:** These are generally undeveloped and/or vacant lands with some natural vegetation and/or wildlife value, including lands used for grazing. These lands may include large and small blocks of habitat and the open space that links those blocks together. This includes habitat that has some level of existing protection (protected open space) or needs to be protected to preserve the ecological function and value of protected open space, especially areas that serve as wildlife linkages and areas with sensitive habitats not covered by existing conservation programs;
- **Community Open Space:** This includes areas that enhance the quality of life in urban areas and completes interconnected networks of parks, trails, greenbelts, community gardens, and urban forests serving the region's communities; and
- **Farmlands:** This category includes prime farmland, farmland of statewide importance, unique farmland and farmland of local importance as defined by the California Department of Conservation. They provide food, products and economic benefits to the region and include the region's remaining prime and other important agricultural lands, especially farmlands intertwined with unprotected natural lands and developing communities.

There are numerous plans and programs throughout Southern California that attempt to conserve open space resources. Examples include:

- An open space element in a city or county general plan
- Natural community conservation plan (NCCP) and habitat conservation plan (HCP)
- Mandated management plans for public lands, such as the Southern California Forest Plan and California Desert Conservation Area Plan
- Integrated watershed management plans
- Open space acquisition and habitat enhancement programs implemented by the California Resource Agency, Conservancies, non-profit organizations and trusts
- Resource specific conservation strategies, such as South Coast Missing Linkages
- Open space and parkland acquisition programs implemented by public-private partnerships and individual conservancies
- Open space planning strategies and initiatives such as Green Visions

While these plans address open space issues, they do not individually fulfill the need for a more holistic regional approach, one which evaluates the collective needs of the six-county



SCAG region. SCAG's approach is to create a cohesive vision and a comprehensive open space strategy by tying together these plans and identifying additional opportunities for conservation.

## THE PLAN

The overall focus of this chapter is to plan and provide for the conservation of the region's open space resources focusing on

- Interconnections among resources
- Future land use decisions that will either strengthen or impair the region's ability to sustain the resources, and
- Opportunities for inter-jurisdictional planning

The intent is to conserve the region's open space resources in a way that will ensure sustainability over time. To help guide this effort, open space resources have been grouped into three categories: natural lands, community open space and farmlands and rangelands.

### SCAG's role will be to:

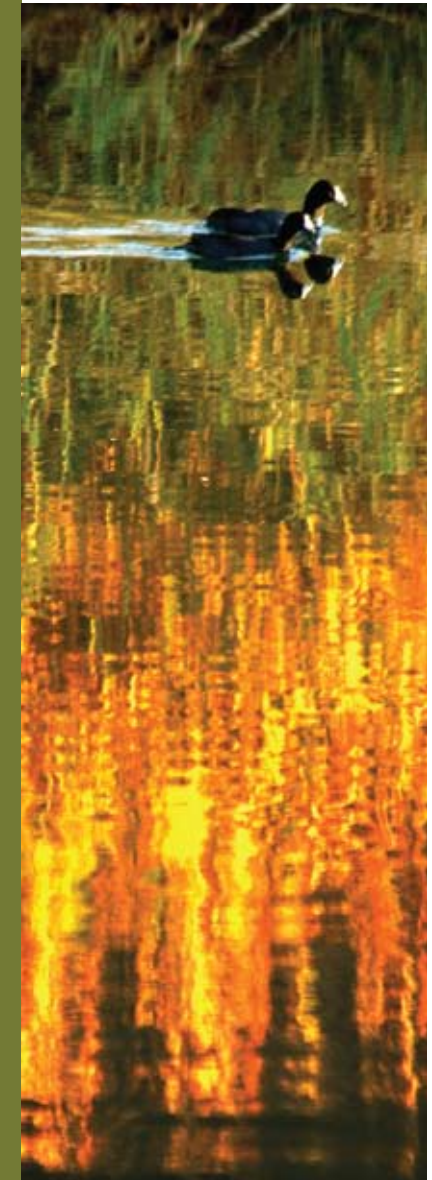
- Maintain the regional open space database and use it to track progress in attaining regional open space conservation goals;
- Integrate the policies and actions herein into its existing transportation planning, growth forecasting, intergov-

ernmental review, and legislative programs, and expand its capacity to provide technical services for open space planning;

- Establish a regional forum for coordinating existing programs and initiating new cooperative efforts that emphasize opportunities for cross-county and cross-jurisdictional open space protection; and
- Work in cooperation with its member agencies and open space conservancies in the region to find ways to supplement existing funding sources for open space conservation.
- Include open space mitigation policies and/or mitigation recommendations in the RTP;
- Link funding for planning and/or transportation projects to comply with SCAG's open space program
- Use the inter-governmental review process to address the open space impacts of regionally significant projects;
- Be a regional clearinghouse for data, funding information, program coordination; and
- Propose legislative solutions.

### SCAG's member agencies will be asked to:

- Propose and participate in cooperative conservation planning efforts;



### Open Space and Water

*The availability of open space in the region directly impacts the quality of our water. As a direct result of the loss of open spaces in the region due to increased urbanization (and as a result increased impervious surfaces), the natural water cycle in which most of the water soaks into the ground during and after storm events, has been replaced by a paved drainage system.*

*As a consequence less water enters groundwater aquifers to become the supply for drinking water wells, increased runoff threatens floods and carries trash and pollutants to the ocean, and we live in an environment that is increasingly more asphalt-black and concrete-gray than green.*

# PRELIMINARY DRAFT

- Adopt the regional open space policies presented in the program and apply those policies in planning and reviewing projects
- Provide updated information on local open space resources for inclusion in the regional open space database

### Local conservancies and other interested parties will be invited to:

- Propose and participate in cooperative efforts with SCAG member agencies
- Provide updated information on local open space resources for inclusion in the regional open space database.

The goals and outcomes included in this chapter focus on the conservation of regionally significant open space resources. To that end, SCAG completed a comprehensive evaluation of open space resources in the region and its neighboring counties. Geographic Information System (GIS) data were collected from existing sources to assist with and inform the evaluation of open space planning issues. These data were evaluated and analyzed to show the distribution of existing open space resources, levels of existing and planning protection and areas of key habitat linkages. Where available, the SCAG data collected and presented as part of this effort was for the entire region, and includes Kern and San Diego Counties.

### NATURAL LANDS

The sustainability of natural lands is directly related to maintaining large blocks of habitat (also called “cores”), keeping them relatively impervious to outside disturbance and allowing wildlife linkages to function. This network of large cores and wildlife linkages are part of an ecosystem where plants and animals occur in populations large enough that natural ecological processes (predation, competitive interaction, natural disturbance and recovery) operate so that evolution is sustained. This vast connected landscape provides a sense of place and spiritual renewal that cannot be provided elsewhere. This network recharges the region’s watershed and water resources by maintaining previous surfaces necessary for groundwater recharge while combating the effects of air pollution and global warming.

Except for northern Ventura County, all natural lands in the SCAG region occur within three of the nine bioregions in Southern California: South Coast, Mojave Desert and Colorado Desert. Bioregions are areas that include multiple ecological communities based on common physical (climate, geology) biological (vegetation, wildlife) and environmental conditions. Northern Ventura County is unique in that it forms the southeast tip of the Central Coast bioregion and is located where five bioregions converge.

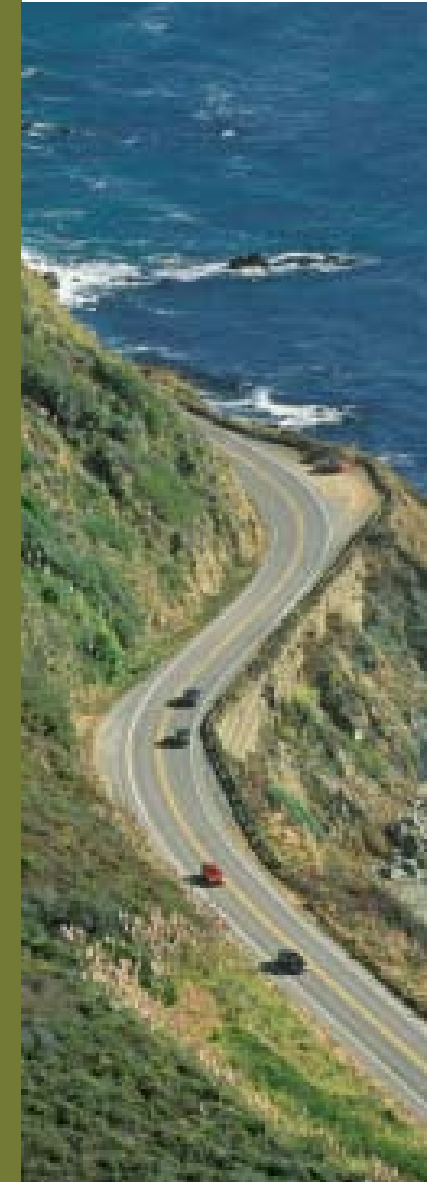
Many of the natural lands in the Southern California bioregions are large interconnected cores. However, near developed areas and along the regional highways, connections between large

tracts of natural lands have been narrowed and fragmented and in some places permanently severed. Wildlife movement corridors, or wildlife “linkages,” are an important component of natural lands. Southcoast Wildlands, a nonprofit organization, evaluated and identified 70 linkages in the SCAG region as areas where natural connectivity is at risk.

One way to determine the overall need for a regional planning effort such as the one SCAG has undertaken is to evaluate the current levels of “protection” for lands in the region, particularly natural lands.<sup>1</sup> This helps to provide a regional context for planning by showing the existing pattern of what is protected and what is not, thereby helping to identify those areas where open space resources are most at risk. Concurrent with this mapping effort, existing plans and programs were reviewed to identify which areas are covered by conservation strategies and which are not.

**Figure 3.1** shows the distribution of many key open space resources including “protected” and “unprotected” cores, connectors and fragments within the SCAG region and its vicinity. It also shows the location of the protected and unprotected areas in relation to wildlife linkages, linkage design areas, park and recreation areas (from SCAG’s 2005 land use inventory) agricultural lands, and developed lands. Together, these form the region’s open space infrastructure. Linkages, cores and connectors exist intra-county and inter-county; they often cross county lines and from the SCAG region into Kern and San Diego Counties.

By evaluating the open space resources identified in Figure 3.1, SCAG identified those areas with high potential for conservation, particularly areas where cross jurisdictional opportunities exist. Generally, these areas do not fall within the limits of any one jurisdiction, and as such provide an appropriate focus for a regional scale document. **Figure 3.2** provides examples of possible conservation opportunity areas; these are areas where mitigation for impacts of regionally significant project and/or conservation efforts by public and private entities should be directed. Although SCAG does not have the authority to purchase or manage lands, conservation of these areas will be achieved through already established programs or through compacts facilitated by SCAG. SCAG should develop Memoranda of Understanding with state and federal resource agencies as necessary to facilitate the conservation of natural lands.

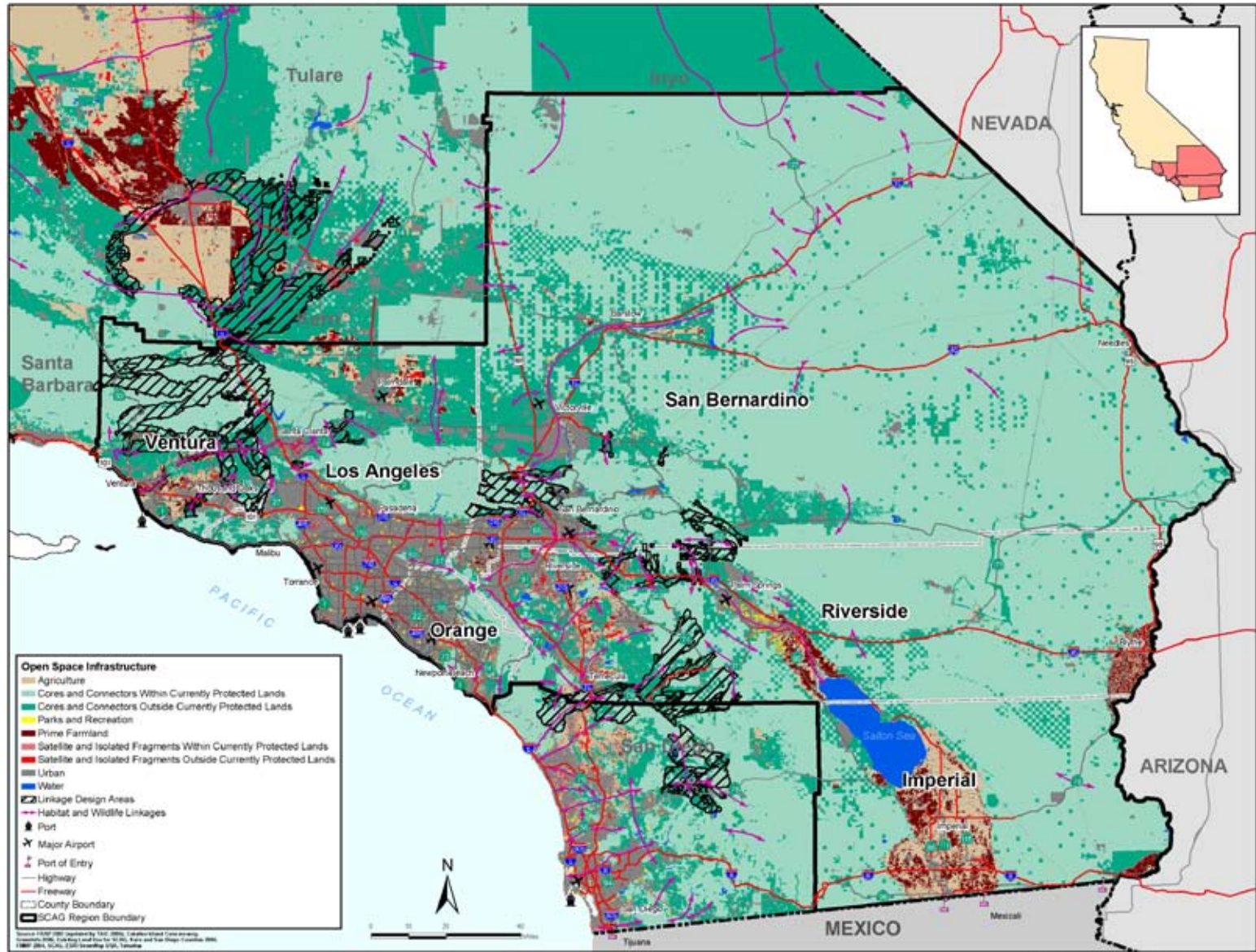




# PRELIMINARY DRAFT

## OPEN SPACE AND HABITAT

FIGURE 3.1: REGIONAL OPEN SPACE INFRASTRUCTURE





**Open Space Infrastructure**

- Agriculture
- Cores and Connectors Within Currently Protected Lands
- Cores and Connectors Outside Currently Protected Lands
- Parks and Recreation
- Prime Farmland
- Satellite and Isolated Fragments Within Currently Protected Lands
- Satellite and Isolated Fragments Outside Currently Protected Lands
- Urban
- Water
- Linkage Design Areas
- Habitat and Wildlife Linkages
- Port
- Major Airport
- Port of Entry
- Highway
- Freeway
- County Boundary
- SCAG Region Boundary

**Examples of Potential Conservation Opportunity Areas**

- Ventura County Wildlife Linkage/Linkage Design and Watershed Areas
- Victorville-Palmdale Corridor
- Western Riverside Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan Area



### *Open Space and Water*

*Open space and park lands have the potential to enhance groundwater water resources (by preserving or expanding the area available for natural groundwater recharge), improve surface water quality (to the extent that these open spaces filter, retain, or detain stormwater runoff), and provide opportunities to reuse treated runoff or recycled water for irrigation (thereby reducing the demand for potable water).*

*The loss of functional native habitat and the alteration of natural channels in urbanized areas (such as the Los Angeles River) have also reduced the extent to which natural processes can remove contaminants in urban and stormwater runoff, cycle nutrients through watersheds, and provide functional habitat for species.*

# PRELIMINARY DRAFT

## Open Space and Habitat–Natural Lands Goals

- Ensure a sustainable ecology by protecting and enhancing the region's open space infrastructure and mitigate growth and transportation related impacts to natural lands by:
  - ◆ Conserving natural lands that are necessary to preserve the ecological function and value of the region's ecosystems;
  - ◆ Conserving wildlife linkages as critical components of the region's open space infrastructure;
  - ◆ Coordinating transportation and open space to reduce transportation impacts to natural lands

## Open Space and Habitat–Natural Lands Outcomes

- By 2035, increase the amount of protected open space in the region by at least 700,000<sup>2</sup> acres of natural lands that include important core areas,<sup>3</sup> wildlife linkages, have special status habitats or species and/or buffer protected natural lands from development. The number of acres protected would be roughly proportionate to the urban footprint of the 2004 Regional Transportation Plan.
- By 2012, put in place approved conservation strategies for all regionally significant wildlife linkages.

### OPEN SPACE AND HABITAT–NATURAL LANDS ACTION PLAN

IGR/Best Practices	Legislation	Coordination	Constrained Policies	Potential for Direct/Indirect Benefits								Other Benefits		
				Land Use	Transportation	Air Quality	Water	Energy	Open Space	Economy	Security	Solid Waste	Public Health	Climate Change
SCAG Policies (SCAG policies shall be subject to consideration for future Overall Work Plans)														
			OSN-1 Track and monitor open space conservation efforts in the region. • SCAG shall set up a clearinghouse of important GIS data used for open space planning. SCAG shall maintain and update the regional open space database, track open space conservation and development (e.g. any activity that reduces the biological value of natural lands compared to baseline conditions) in the region and will commit to providing annual updates on conservation efforts.	X	X	X	X	X	X				X	X
X			OSN-2 Use SCAG’s Intergovernmental Review (IGR) process to comment on regional projects. • SCAG shall establish criteria for evaluating impacts to regionally significant open space resources, and will recommend mitigation measures for significant impacts to regional resources. These recommendations will be included in SCAG’s Regional Open Space Guidance. • Priority review will include 1) existing and proposed General Plans and 2) any individual project that will have a significant impact on natural open space.	X	X	X	X	X	X				X	X
			OSN-3 Develop and implement guidance on mitigation options for open space impacts • SCAG shall develop and implement coordinated mitigation programs for regional projects, with an emphasis on regional transportation projects. • SCAG shall produce and maintain a list/map of potential conservation opportunity areas. These conservation opportunity areas may be used by local governments and project sponsors as priority areas for mitigating impacts to open space resources. (see <i>Regional Open Space Guidance</i> for a complete description of Conservation Opportunity Areas) • SCAG shall work in partnership with state and federal agencies, local conservancies and other groups to conserve natural lands in key locations through existing conservation programs, mitigation for the impacts of regional projects and conservation compacts facilitated by SCAG. • SCAG shall work with County Transportation Commissions and Caltrans to refine the proposed open space consistency guidelines as necessary.	X	X	X	X		X				X	X
			OSN-4 SCAG shall support policies and actions that preserve natural areas, specifically those areas identified in local, state, and federal plans.	X		X	X		X				X	X
			OSN-5 SCAG shall support the protection of vital resources such as wetlands, groundwater recharge areas, woodlands, production lands, and land containing unique and endangered plants and animals.	X		X	X		X				X	
			OSN-6 SCAG shall encourage the implementation of measures aimed at the preservation and protection of recorded and unrecorded cultural resources and archaeological sites	X					X					
X			OSN-7 SCAG shall encourage “watershed management” programs and strategies, recognizing the primary role of local governments in such efforts	X	X	X	X	X	X				X	

# PRELIMINARY DRAFT

## OPEN SPACE AND HABITAT

IGR/Best Practices	Legislation	Coordination	Constrained Policies	Potential for Direct/Indirect Benefits								Other Benefits		
				Land Use	Transportation	Air Quality	Water	Energy	Open Space	Economy	Security	Solid Waste	Public Health	Climate Change
X			OSN-8 SCAG shall support regional efforts to identify and cooperatively plan for wetlands to facilitate both sustaining the amount and quality of wetlands in the region and expediting the process for obtaining wetlands permits.	X			X		X				X	
X			OSN-9 SCAG shall support and work with communities and research entities on developing measures of the economic value of natural lands.	X		X	X		X					
X			OSN-10 Integrate open space assumptions into the Regional Growth Forecast • SCAG shall prepare growth forecasts for the region that are based on assumptions that accurately reflect allowed uses on 1) existing designated open space 2) areas subject to regulations that preclude or limit uses and 3) areas where some or all of the lands are proposed for preservation under approved conservation programs.	X	X		X		X					X
	X		OSN-11 Seek funding for conservation of natural lands • SCAG shall partner with local agencies and non-profit foundations in situations where a regional entity is necessary to secure funds. • SCAG shall seek support (financial, technical, etc) at the state and federal level for a prototype regional open space database program.				X		X					
Local Government Policies														
X			OSN-12 Local governments should track and Monitor Open Space Conservation by • Considering the most recent annual report on open space conservation in planning and evaluating projects and programs in areas with regionally significant open space resources. • Ensuring consistency with the open space conservation policies and goals of the RCP to be eligible for future funding opportunities and programs administered by SCAG.	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X
X			OSN-13 Local governments should develop and implement mitigation for open space impacts by: • Promoting coordinated mitigation programs for regional projects and establish the basis for inter regional conservation strategies. • Planning development in locations least likely to cause environmental impact.	X	X		X		X			X	X	X
Project Sponsor and Developer Policies														



IGR/Best Practices	Legis lation	Coordination	Constrained Policies	Potential for Direct/Indirect Benefits								Other Benefits		
				Land Use	Transportation	Air Quality	Water	Energy	Open Space	Economy	Security	Solid Waste	Public Health	Climate Change
X			<p>OSN-14 Developers and local governments should implement mitigation for open space impacts through the following activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Individual projects submitted for IGR review should either avoid significant impacts to regionally significant open space resources or mitigate the significant impacts through measures consistent with regional open space policies for conserving natural lands, community open space and farmlands. All projects submitted for IGR review shall demonstrate consideration of alternatives that would avoid or reduce impacts to open space.</li><li>Individual projects should include into project design, to the maximum extent practicable, mitigation measures and recommended best practices aimed at minimizing or avoiding impacts to natural lands, including, but not limited to FHWA's Critter Crossings, and Ventura County Mitigation Guidelines.</li><li>Project level mitigation for RTP's significant cumulative and growth-inducing impacts on open space resources will include but not be limited to the conservation of natural lands, community open space and important farmland through existing programs in the region or through multi-party conservation compacts facilitated by SCAG.</li><li>Project sponsors should ensure that transportation systems proposed in the RTP avoid or mitigate significant impacts to natural lands, community open space and important farmland, including cumulative impacts and open space impacts from the growth associated with transportation projects and improvements.</li><li>Project sponsors should ensure that at least one acre of unprotected open space is permanently conserved for each acre of open space developed as a result of growth that accompanies transportation projects/improvements.</li></ul>	X	X		X		X			X	X	X

## OPEN SPACE AND HABITAT

IGR/Best Practices	Legisla-tion	Coordination	Strategic Initiatives	Potential for Direct/Indirect Benefits								Other Benefits		
				Land Use	Transportation	Air Quality	Water	Energy	Open Space	Economy	Security	Solid Waste	Public Health	Climate Change
SCAG Initiatives (SCAG initiatives shall be subject to consideration for future Overall Work Plans)														
		X	OSNSI-1 SCAG shall seek to develop cooperative agreements and multi party conservation compacts to accelerate the conservation of natural lands in the region.	X	X	X	X		X				X	X
	X		OSNSI-2 SCAG shall put in place an open space funding program to demonstrate to state/federal agencies that SCAG is prepared to serve as the regional entity to distribute state/federal funds for open space conservation.	X	X		X		X				X	X
	X		OSNSI-3 SCAG shall seek to create new sources of funding for open space conservation.		X		X		X					X
X			OSNSI-4 SCAG shall establish decision-making tools for identifying and prioritizing open space conservation projects, such as those by the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) in distributing funding through the Transnet Environmental Mitigation Program (EMP).		X	X	X		X				X	X
	X		OSNSI-5 SCAG should develop Memoranda of Understanding with state and federal resource agencies as necessary to facilitate the conservation of natural lands.	X	X		X		X				X	X

## COMMUNITY OPEN SPACE

Community open space exists in or serves developed communities. Examples include park and recreation areas, community gardens, dedicated open space, urban forests, greenbelts and trail systems. Sustainable community open space is accessible by alternative modes of transportation, whether on foot, on bicycle, or by riding transit. It is distributed so that it serves a wide range of user groups in the region, from children to seniors and features amenities that meet the recreation and outdoor needs of its diverse users. Sustainable community open space also fulfills multiple planning and quality of life objectives contributing to watershed and water quality, air quality management and public health.

### Parks and Public Health

A 1996 report by the U.S. Surgeon General found that people who engage in regular physical activity benefit from reduced risk of premature death; reduced risk of coronary heart disease, hypertension, colon cancer, and non-insulin dependent diabetes; improved physical functioning in persons suffering from poor health; and healthier cardiovascular, respiratory and endocrine systems. Physical activity also produces important psychological benefits relieving symptoms of depression and anxiety; improving mood and enhancing psychological well being.<sup>4</sup>

The link between obesity and community open space is particularly relevant. Over the last decade, California has experienced

one of the fastest rates of increase in adult obesity of any state in the nation.<sup>5</sup> More than half of California adults now are overweight or already obese. Rates among African American and Latino adults, men over age 25 years, and adults with less than a high school education exceed 60 percent and there is no sign that the increases in obesity are slowing.<sup>6</sup>

The effects of obesity are putting a strain on the health care system and adding additional costs in loss of productivity. Estimated costs in California attributable to physical inactivity, obesity and overweight in 2005 were projected to reach \$28 billion. A ten percent improvement – just one person of ten who becomes more active and maintains a healthy weight over a five-year period – could result in savings of nearly \$13 billion.<sup>7</sup>

A report published by The Trust for Public Land concluded that strong evidence shows that when people have access to parks, they exercise more.<sup>8</sup> In a study published by the CDC, creation of or enhanced access to places for physical activity led to a 25.6 percent increase in the percentage of people exercising three or more days per week. The study also found that obesity is more likely in unwalkable neighborhoods, but rates of obesity go down as measures of walkability go up.<sup>9</sup>

SCAG evaluated the community open space availability in 16 cities in the region and compared them to the National Recreation and Parks Association standards recommended for park types.<sup>10</sup> As measured against NRPA's overall parks to people standard (6.25-10 acres/1,000 people) three cities





### Open Space and Water

*The availability of open space in the region directly impacts the quality of our water. As a direct result of the loss of open spaces in the region due to increased urbanization (and as a result increased impervious surfaces), the natural water cycle in which most of the water soaks into the ground during and after storm events, has been replaced by a paved drainage system.*

*As a consequence less water enters groundwater aquifers to become the supply for drinking water wells, increased runoff threatens floods and carries trash and pollutants to the ocean, and we live in an environment that is increasingly more asphalt-black and concrete-gray than green.*

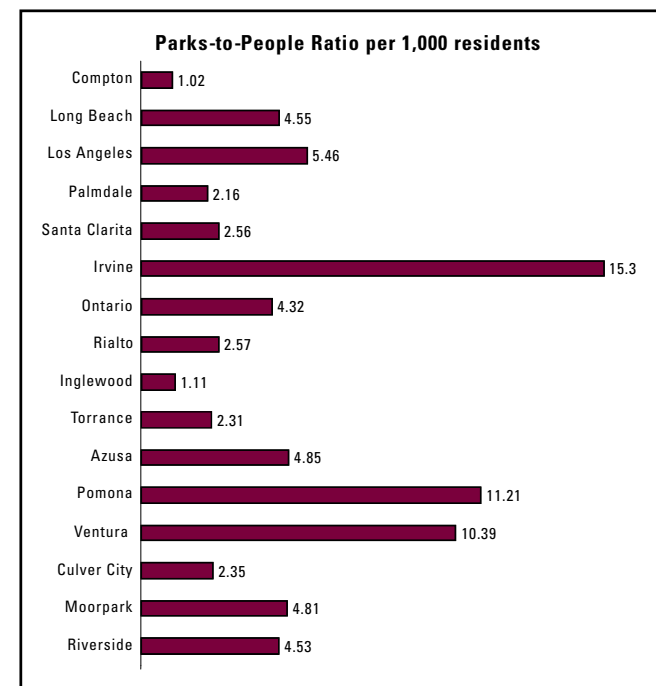
exceeded the standard (Irvine, Pomona and Ventura) while the rest of the cities fell below the standard. Table 1 shows the results for each of the cities.

### Levels of Service

As shown in **Figure 3.3**, the range of acres of parkland per 1,000 people varies greatly throughout several cities. Although, NPRA standards may be helpful to get a general understanding of availability of parkland in a particular city, these standards were developed in the 1930s and fail to reflect the dynamic environment and variety of today's communities. For instance, NPRA standards do not address access nor do they include many types of open space common in urban environments such as urban forests, greenbelts and trails. For that reason, SCAG is encouraging communities to utilize a new paradigm such as Levels of Service (LOS) to measure park needs for their communities. Generally, the LOS paradigm takes into account the following factors:<sup>11</sup>

- Existing open space plans and policies (general plan open space element, parks and recreation plan, watershed management plan)
- Community preference as ascertained by survey, questionnaire and public workshop
- Accessibility by underrepresented groups and underserved populations, including low income or below poverty level communities, underrepresented ethnic groups,

**FIGURE 3.3**



children, seniors, disabled individuals and those who are transit dependent

- Multi-modal transportation access within ½ mile
- Multi-purpose, multi-function open space, such as river parks
- Multi-agency initiatives that cover broad geographic areas; and
- Compass Blueprint areas

LOS can be assigned similar to the system used in traffic analysis with ranking of “A” for excellent through “E” for failing. A community with a preponderance of these types of criteria provides a higher level of service

### **Open Space and Habitat–Community Open Space Goals**

- Enhance the region’s parks, trails and community open space infrastructure to support the aesthetic, recreational and quality-of-life needs, providing the highest level of service to our growing region by:
  - ◆ Creating new community open space that is interconnected, accessible, equitably distributed and provides public health benefits;
  - ◆ Improving existing community open space through urban forestry and other programs that provide environmental benefits.
- An “above average” LOS for community open space, by 2012, in areas that participated in SCAG’s Compass Blueprint demonstration projects.
- From 2007 conditions, increase the percentage of transit trips that can access community open space in one hour or less by 2012.

### **Open Space and Habitat–Community Open Space Outcomes**

- By 2035, all SCAG subregions have community open space systems that have an “above average” level of service (LOS).



## OPEN SPACE AND HABITAT

### OPEN SPACE AND HABITAT—COMMUNITY OPEN SPACE ACTION PLAN

IGR/Best Practices	Legislation	Coordination	Constrained Policies	Potential for Direct/Indirect Benefits								Other Benefits		
				Land Use	Transportation	Air Quality	Water	Energy	Open Space	Economy	Security	Solid Waste	Public Health	Climate Change
SCAG Policies (SCAG policies shall be subject to consideration for future Overall Work Plans)														
			OSC-1 SCAG, in collaboration with its member agencies, shall work to enhance community open space and its accessibility	X	X	X	X	X	X				X	X
			OSC-2 SCAG shall continue to work with the state to develop approaches for evaluating environmental impacts within the Compass Blueprint program, particularly energy, air quality, water, and open space and habitat.	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X
		X	OSC-3 SCAG and its member agencies will work with open space experts and community interest groups to develop a Level of Service ranking and evaluation system for community open space in the region.	X	X	X		X	X				X	X
		X	OSC-4 SCAG shall support local jurisdictions and other service providers in their efforts to develop sustainable communities and provide, equally to all members of society, accessible and effective services such as: public education, housing, health care, social services, recreational facilities, law enforcement, and fire protection.	X	X	X		X						X
		X	OSC-5 SCAG shall encourage member jurisdictions to work as partners to address regional outdoor recreation needs and to acquire the necessary funding for the implementation of their plans and programs.	X		X	X		X				X	
		X	OSC-6 SCAG shall encourage member jurisdictions that have trails and trail segments determined to be regionally significant to work together to support regional trail networks. SCAG shall encourage joint use of utility, transportation and other rights-of-way, greenbelts, and biodiversity areas.	X	X	X		X	X				X	X
Local Government Policies/Project Sponsor and Developer Policies														
X			OSC-7 Local governments should prepare a Needs Assessment to determine the adequate community open space level for their areas.	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X
X			OSC-8 Local governments should encourage patterns of urban development and land use, which reduce costs on infrastructure and make better use of existing facilities.	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X
X			OSC-9 Developers and local governments should increase the accessibility to natural areas lands for outdoor recreation.	X	X	X	X	X	X				X	X



IGR/Best Practices	Legislation	Coordination	Constrained Policies	Potential for Direct/Indirect Benefits								Other Benefits		
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X			OSC-10 Developers and local governments should promote infill development and redevelopment to revitalize existing communities.	X	X	X	X	X	X				X	X
X			OSC-11 Developers should incorporate and local governments should include land use principles, such as green building, that use resources efficiently, eliminate pollution and significantly reduce waste into their projects, zoning codes and other implementation mechanisms.	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X
X			OSC-12 Developers and local governments should promote water-efficient land use and development.	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X
X			OSC-13 Developers and local governments should encourage multiple use spaces and encourage redevelopment in areas where it will provide more opportunities for recreational uses and access to natural areas close to the urban core.	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X

# PRELIMINARY DRAFT

## OPEN SPACE AND HABITAT

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				Land Use	Transportation	Air Quality	Water	Energy	Open Space	Economy	Security	Solid Waste	Public Health	Climate Change
SCAG Initiatives (SCAG initiatives shall be subject to consideration for future Overall Work Plans)														
		X	OSCSI-1 SCAG will work with all subregions, counties and cities to prepare needs assessments and develop and refine LOS criteria . The criteria established through the RCP and ancillary efforts will also be used as criteria for statewide bond funding	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X

## AGRICULTURAL LANDS

Sustainable farmlands are open spaces that maintain food production for the region and are protected from urban encroachment. Conserving sustainable farmland is essential to the overall region as these lands play a key role in maintaining the interconnections of natural lands, community open space and farmlands.

California farmers and ranchers represent a diverse group of individual businesses, with great diversity in farm size and revenue. While globally, exports of agricultural products remain a key driver of agricultural profitability, new market incentives in areas such as renewable energy for production and the development of technologies to convert raw materials into “biofuels” can expand profitability and environmental sustainability opportunities for farmers.

Table 3.1 indicates the importance of agricultural lands to the region as demonstrated by the gross value of products sold.

Based on the 2002 USDA Census of Agriculture, county level data, Imperial, Ventura and Riverside Counties round out the top ten producing counties in the state, each with more than one billion in gross value of direct agricultural production.

## Conversion of Farmlands

Historically development patterns in the region have been tied as much to the conversion of agricultural lands as to the consumption of natural lands for urban uses. Rapid growth in the region continues to push development outward in search of cheap land that will translate into more affordable housing. Development pressures can make the value of a farmer’s land higher than the value of the crops farmed on the land. A key issue in the region today is whether the high rate of farmland conversion in recent years can be slowed to prevent irreversible losses. An estimated 230,000 acres of farmland and grazing land were converted to non-agricultural uses and/or applied

**TABLE 3.1 TOTAL AGRICULTURAL VALUE BY COUNTY<sup>a, b</sup>**

County	2005	2006	2002 State Rank <sup>b</sup>
Riverside	1,168,671,100	1,102,438,400	10
Orange	312,336,287	N/A	22
San Bernardino	565,101,000	435,787,200	15
Los Angeles	277,844,000	N/A	21
Ventura	1,225,109,000	1,508,174,000	9
Imperial	1,286,066,000	1,365,368,000	8

<sup>a</sup> Figures are based on total gross value as indicated in county agricultural reports for 2005 and 2006 (when available)

<sup>b</sup> based on total value of agricultural products sold

From the USDA 2002 Census of Agriculture county profiles





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for development entitlements between 1996 and 2004. If this trend continues, the existing inventory of agricultural lands could be reduced by 700,000 acres before 2030.

As agriculture and suburbanization intersect, problems often arise. With so many people living close to so much commercial farming, the negative impacts flow in both directions. For suburban neighbors, there are concerns over dust, noise, odor and even the health effects of living near industrial type activities that use chemicals, heavy machinery and concentrated animal facilities. While for farmers, operating close to new neighborhoods often means reduced productivity and income, regulatory constraints, vandalism and legal liability. Often, the conflict ends in the conversion of still more farmland. **Figure 3.4** highlights those areas where farmlands and urbanization intersect.

Recently studies have looked for ways to integrate farmlands into communities that can reduce or eliminate some of the edge effects described above. New Ruralism is a framework for connecting the concepts of sustainable agriculture and New Urbanism (compact development/ smart growth). It seeks to create permanent agriculture preserves as sources of fresh food for urban regions. These preserves could take the form of green food belt perimeters, buffers between urban areas, small agricultural parks, and/or bigger preserves that include larger farms and rural settlements. The goal is to integrate small to medium scale sustainable agriculture into urban environments, these agricultural preserves can also overlap with areas for

wildlife and habitat management and for passive recreation. A major focus of New Ruralism is connecting urban areas to farms through locally grown food.

### Eating Locally

The food that Southern Californians eat directly affects local and state policy and in turn, local and state policy affects the food Southern Californians eat. Currently, the federal government spends billions of dollars to subsidize grains and other crops while providing little support for fruits and vegetables. Rising health care costs and increases in diet related diseases such as diabetes and obesity indicate that healthier diets need to be a priority for the region.

Organic food is produced by farmers who emphasize the use of renewable resources and the conservation of soil and water to enhance environmental quality for future generations. Before a product can be labeled “organic,” a USDA accredited certifier inspects the farm where the food is grown to make sure the farmer is following all the rules necessary to meet USDA organic standards. Companies that handle or process organic food before it gets to the local supermarket or restaurant must be certified and inspected also. **Table 3.2** shows the acres of organic farming in the region. Imperial County does not keep estimates of organic farming.

**TABLE 3.2 ORGANIC FARMLANDS IN THE SCAG REGION - 2005**

County	Organic Acres <sup>a</sup>	Total Farmland <sup>b</sup>	Percent Share
Riverside	3,200	466,467	0.7
Orange	143	13,481	1.1
San Bernardino	244	34,673	0.07
Los Angeles	108	44,050	0.3
Ventura	4,712	297,074	1.6
Imperial	N/A	545,611	N/A

<sup>a</sup> Acreage based on annual Agricultural Commissioners Reports for each county

<sup>b</sup> Based on California Department of Conservation 2005 estimates, excludes rangelands/grazing lands

## Open Space and Habitat–Agricultural Lands Goals

- Preserve the productivity and viability of the region’s agricultural lands while supporting a sustainable economy and region by:
  - ◆ Maintaining a viable level of agriculture to support economic and food supply needs for the region while supporting sustainable energy, air quality and transportation policies;
  - ◆ Promote and support a strong locally-grown food system by encouraging community farming and developing cooperative farming initiatives that use sustainable farming practices.

## Open Space and Habitat–Agricultural Lands Outcomes

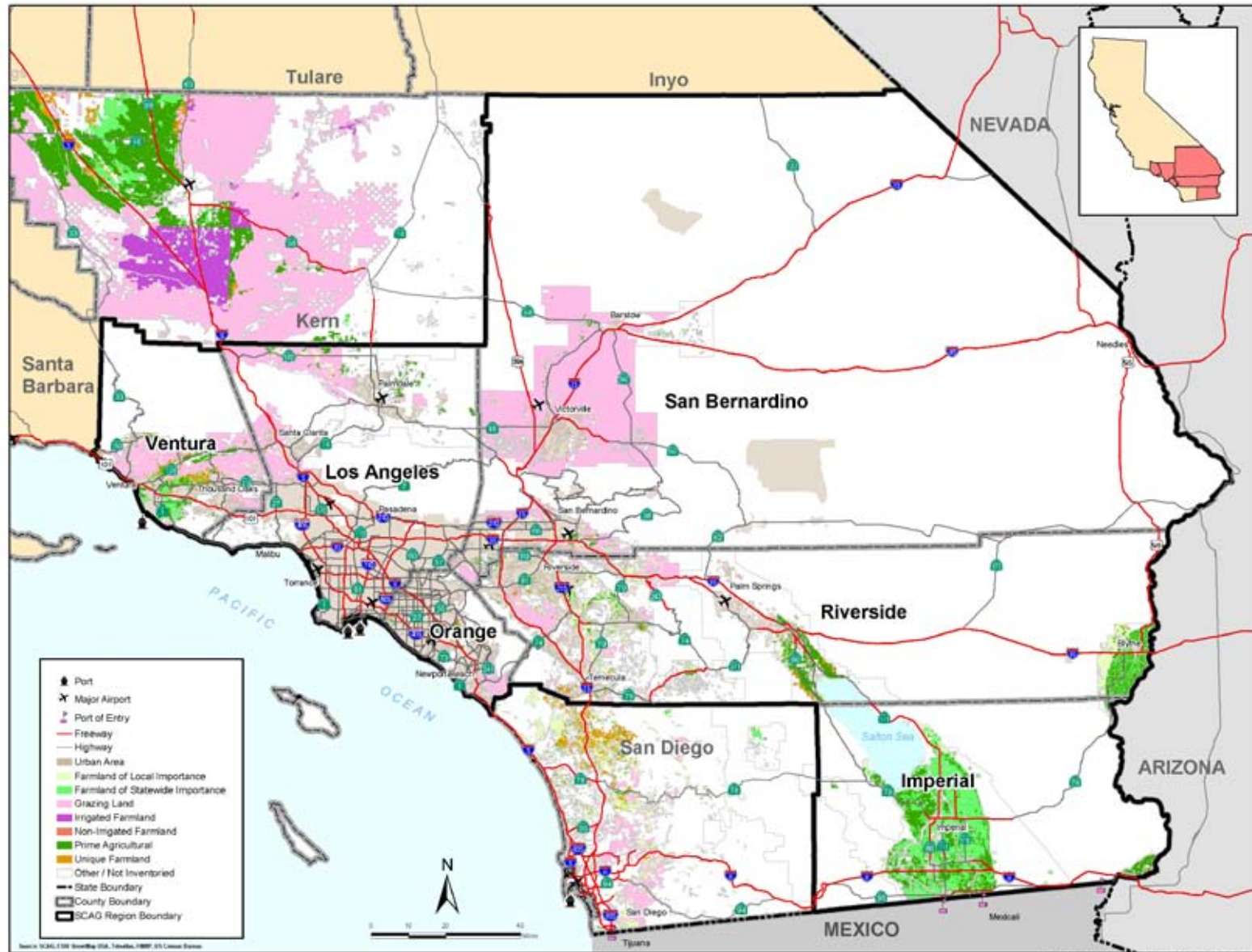
- Develop a new regional farmland conservation strategy and enroll at least 6,500<sup>12</sup> acres of prime farmland in the first four years.
- No net loss of farmlands enrolled in the regional program through 2035.



# PRELIMINARY DRAFT

## OPEN SPACE AND HABITAT

**FIGURE 3.3: PRIME FARMLAND GRAZING**



### OPEN SPACE AND HABITAT-AGRICULTURAL LANDS ACTION PLAN

IGR/Best Practices		Legislation	Coordination	Constrained Policies	Potential for Direct/Indirect Benefits								Other Benefits		
					Land Use	Transportation	Air Quality	Water	Energy	Open Space	Economy	Security	Solid Waste	Public Health	Climate Change
SCAG Policies (SCAG policies shall be subject to consideration for future Overall Work Plans)															
		X	OSA-1 SCAG shall support policies that preserve and promote the productivity and viability of agricultural lands.		X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
X			OSA-2 SCAG shall use its IGR process to review projects with potentially significant impacts to important farmlands and recommend impact avoidance and mitigation measures.		X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
X		X	OSA-3 SCAG shall work with its member agencies and the region's farmland interests to develop regional guidelines for buffering farmland from urban encroachment, resolving conflicts that prevent farming on hillsides and other designated areas, and closing loopholes that allow conversion to non-farm uses without a grading permit.		X	X	X	X	X	X		X			X
		X	OSA-4 Promote the availability of locally grown and organic food in the region.			X	X	X	X			X		X	X
Local Government Policies															
X			OSA-5 Promote the availability of locally grown and organic food in the region. • Local governments should establish transfer of development rights (TDR) programs to direct growth to less agriculturally valuable lands (while considering the potential effects at the sites receiving the transfer) and ensure the continued protection of the most agriculturally valuable land within each county through the purchase of the development rights for these lands. • Local governments should consider other tools for the preservation of agricultural lands such as eliminating estates and ranchettes and clustering to retain productive agricultural land. • Local governments should ease restrictions on farmer's markets and encourage cooperative farming initiatives to increase the availability of locally grown food. • Local governments should consider partnering with school districts to develop farm-to-school programs.		X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X
X			OSA-6 Local governments are encouraged to obtain assistance from the American Farmland Trust in developing and implementing farmland conservation measures or avoid impacts to important farmlands.		X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
X			OSA-7 Local governments should avoid the premature conversion of farmlands by promoting infill development and the continuation of agricultural uses until urban development is imminent; if development of agricultural lands is necessary, growth should be directed to those lands on which the continued viability of agricultural production has been compromised by surrounding urban development or the loss of local markets.		X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X



# PRELIMINARY DRAFT

IGR/Best Practices	Legislation	Coordination	Constrained Policies	Potential for Direct/Indirect Benefits									Other Benefits	
				Land Use	Transportation	Air Quality	Water	Energy	Open Space	Economy	Security	Solid Waste	Public Health	Climate Change
Project Sponsors and Developers														
X			OSA-8 Developers and local governments should submit for IGR review projects with potentially significant impacts to important farmlands. Projects should include mitigation measures to reduce impacts and demonstrate project alternatives that avoid or lessen impacts. at a 1:1 ratio.	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X

IGR/Best Practices	Legislation	Coordination	Strategic Initiatives	Potential for Direct/Indirect Benefits								Other Benefits	
				Land Use	Transportation	Air Quality	Water	Energy	Open Space	Economy	Security	Solid Waste	Public Health
SCAG Initiatives (SCAG initiatives shall be subject to consideration for future Overall Work Plans)													
		X	OSASI-1 SCAG shall work with the agriculture community and other interested parties to establish a regional Farmland Conservation Strategy.	X			X		X				X
	X		OSASI-2 SCAG shall work with the state to ensure that changes in the Williamson Act will not result in the loss of preserved farmlands.	X			X		X				X
	X		OSASI-3 SCAG shall work with the state, local farming interests and other interested parties to develop a new alternative statewide farmland conservation strategy that provides flexibility in terms of years in preservation, combined with tiered tax benefits (i.e., the longer the land is in preservation, the greater the tax benefit).	X			X	X	X		X		X

- <sup>1</sup> To provide a “snapshot” of protected lands SCAG used a database compiled by GreenInfo, a nonprofit organization specializing in GIS related services, and the Managed Lands Database compiled by the Conservation Biology Institute (CBI), a nonprofit organization specializing in conservation planning.
- <sup>2</sup> From 2004 RTP PEIR p. 3.1-17 “In addition to direct impacts on land use, the urban footprint of new development supported by the 2004 RTP is expected to consume 500,000 to 700,000 acres of vacant, undeveloped land by 2030.” Direct impacts include 7,700 of grazing land, 1,400 acres of open space, 6,500 acres of prime farmland and 21,300 acres of vacant lands
- <sup>3</sup> Core areas are habitat blocks, linkages, or watershed units that protect regional populations of native species, including sensitive, endemic, keystone and umbrella species, and the ecological processes that maintain them.
- <sup>4</sup> CDC. Physical Activity and Health: A Report on Recommendations of the Task Force on Community Preventive Services. Retrieved online August 23, 2007 <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5018a1.htm>
- <sup>5</sup> CDC. Prevalence of Obesity Among U.S. Adults by State Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (1991–2001). Retrieved online August 23, 2007, [http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/trend/prev\\_reg.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/trend/prev_reg.htm).
- <sup>6</sup> California Department of Health Services. The Economic costs of Physical Inactivity, Obesity, and Overweight in California Adults: Health Care, Workers’ Compensation, and Lost Productivity. Retrieved online August 23 2007 <http://www.dhs.ca.gov/ps/cdic/cpns/press/downloads/CostofObesityToplineReport.pdf>.
- <sup>7</sup> California Department of Health Services. The Economic costs of Physical Inactivity, Obesity, and Overweight in California Adults: Health Care, Workers’ Compensation, and Lost Productivity. <http://www.dhs.ca.gov/ps/cdic/cpns/press/downloads/CostofObesityToplineReport.pdf>. 2005.
- <sup>8</sup> The Trust for Public Land. The Benefits of Parks. Retrieved online August 23, 2007 [http://www.tpl.org/content\\_documents/parks\\_for\\_people\\_Jul2005.pdf](http://www.tpl.org/content_documents/parks_for_people_Jul2005.pdf)
- <sup>9</sup> CDC. Increasing Physical Activity A Report on Recommendations of the Task Fore on Community Preventive Services. Retrieved online August 23, 2007 <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5018a1.htm>
- <sup>10</sup> Complete results of the case studies are available in the SCAG’s Regional Open Space Program, 2008
- <sup>11</sup> For a complete description of LOS and Needs Assessment see SCAG’s Regional Open Space Program, 2008
- <sup>12</sup> 6,500 acres identified of prime farmland is the number of acres of identified as directly impacted by projects in the 2004 RTP.